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SUBJECT: NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE PROVIDING SUPPORT IN
ADVANCE OF IRAQI PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS

(U) This message is Sensitive but Unclassified - not for
Internet distribution.

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Heather Therrien, Political Party
Development
Director for the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in
Iraq, outlined NDI's political party training and election
observer training efforts to an inter-agency provincial
election working group at Embassy Baghdad on October 28,
¶2008. During her briefing, Therrien highlighted NDI's
several years of experience of working within Iraq, and the
differences they have observed during this election cycle.
Following her presentation, Therrien fielded questions from
representatives of Multinational Force - Iraq, USAID and
others. The International Republican Institute has been
invited to present their Iraq program at a future meeting
of the election working group. END SUMMARY

POLITICAL PARTY TRAINING

¶2. (SBU) NDI began political party training focused on the
provincial elections in July 2008. Through September 2008,
NDI limited its political party training to more generic
issues such as constituent services and party platform
development. As the details of the election law were
determined with its passage on September 24, NDI was able
to begin training political party agents. Party agents
will observe campaign and election day activities. It is
imperative that they operate under a code of conduct and be
fully aware of the laws determining legal and illegal
activities, and are prepared to report any perceived
irregularities through appropriate GOI channels. Training
by NDI will enhance confidence in the system, and ensure
that parties are aware of their legal recourse.

¶3. (SBU) At the request of the Independent High Electoral
Commission (IHEC) of Iraq, NDI is also training party
activists on the details of the election law and campaign
regulations. Confronted for the first time with an open-
list ballot, there is the danger that many Iraqis will not
fully understand the mechanism for allocating seats in the
provincial councils following the election. Such confusion
raises the likelihood of accusations of fraud and
corruption. Through comprehensive training, party
activists are informed of the seat allocation mechanism to
mitigate such protests.

¶4. (SBU) As the parties identify and register the thousands
of
candidates that will compete for provincial council seats,
NDI anticipates initiating its candidate training program
in mid-November. Candidates will be trained on messaging,
campaign tactics and conduct. NDI has focused on
communicating with constituents, and Therrein, who has been
working in Iraq since 2004 and participated in NDI
political training during the 2005 electoral season,
commented that "for the first time we are seeing evidence
of parties listening to their constituents and shaping
messages accordingly."

NEW AND EMERGING POLITICAL ENTITIES

¶5. (SBU) Therrien reported that NDI's candidate training may extend well into December as they offer opportunities to the many new and emerging political entities within Iraq. NDI has met with more than 20 such groups in the past few months. These groups have ranged in size from 3-4 individuals who have splintered off from existing parties to larger, seemingly more viable independent entities. Therrien commented that some of the smaller groups may be viable only at the local level while others may be able to compete at the provincial level. NDI is committed to working with such groups, affording them the opportunity to develop.

¶6. (SBU) COMMENT: NDI, and its counterpart the International Republican Institute (IRI), has been operational in Iraq since 2003, and has established a solid working relationship with both the GOI and with the many political parties and entities within the country. Their work, funded through the state Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, is designed to meet the objectives of the United States Strategy for Democracy and Governance in Iraq. While much work remains to be done in Iraq, the programs being carried out in anticipation of the provincial elections are a step forward in institutionalizing democratic political processes that resolve disputes peacefully. END COMMENT
CROCKER